

# One Function, Several Ways: Inviting, Making, and Responding to Suggestions

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This article shows how various structural patterns can be used to express a single function. A set of activities has been devised around one function, and an attempt has been made to show the interplay of several structural patterns for this one function.

The lessons described below were devised for non-TESL teacher trainees at the teacher-training college in Malaysia, to enable them to learn to say in English what they want and need to say. When a lesson is focussed on a particular function, the teacher trainees will learn that there are several ways to say the same thing. They will learn, for instance, that there are several ways of making a suggestion, ranging from formal to informal.

We believe that the primary purpose of our instruction in English is to help teacher trainees use English fluently and appropriately. While some classroom time will be devoted to teaching English functionally and to having the trainees practise certain structural patterns, we should remember that the purpose of such instruction is simply to help them gain communicative competence and confidence in using the language.

## **Activity 1: Problem-solving**

*Teaching point:* Different ways of inviting, making, rejecting, or approving suggestions.

The purpose of this activity is to encourage the learners to identify the structural patterns and to analyze their properties in sentences based on inviting, making, rejecting, or approving suggestions. One way of getting them to do this is to set up a problem and ask them to solve it. The problem can be, for example, sentences that manifest the same function but have different structural patterns; the learners are required to identify the different structural patterns. The example below shows how, in solving such problems, the learners become aware of how grammar works for a particular function.

### **WIN-A-HOLIDAY COMPETITION**

Angela has won first prize in a Win-a-Holiday competition. She can go anywhere in the world and can spend up to \$15,000. She is having a problem deciding where to go. Her friend Ahmad gives her a few suggestions.

A. Read the dialogue

**Angela:** I don't know where to go, Ahmad. What do you suggest?

**Ahmad:** I suggest you go to London. It's a fantastic place, so modern, so developed...beautiful roads, a good transport system, great scenery, everything efficient.

**Angela:** I don't think that appeals to me very much after living in Penang. I want to get away from traffic jams and pollution.

**Ahmed:** What about Indonesia, then? Not Jakarta, of course, but to the east...say Bali.

**Angela:** I was thinking of going farther away. Indonesia is very near, isn't it?

**Ahmed:** Mmm...well, if you don't like that idea, another possibility is France. You'd love France...all the art and culture, old towns, museums. Fashions...

**Angela:** Well, I do like art, but I don't want to spend all my time in museums.

**Ahmed:** Wait a minute, I've got the ideal place. If I were you, I'd go to the Bahamas. Think of it...the lovely sandy beaches...the slow moving life...the friendly people.

**Angela:** Oh, yes...that sounds marvelous. I think I'll go there. Thanks for all your suggestions.

B. Now identify the sentences that have been used for "inviting, making, rejecting, and approving suggestions: in the dialogue above. Then write the appropriate sentences in the spaces provided.

1. Inviting suggestions:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Making suggestions:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Rejecting suggestions:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Approving suggestions:

\_\_\_\_\_

These are the suggested answers for the task above:

1. What do you suggest?
2. a. I suggest you go to London.  
b. What about Indonesia, then?  
c. . . . well, if you don't like that idea, another possibility is France.  
d. If I were you, I'd go to the Bahamas.
3. a. I don't think that appeals to me. . . .  
b. I was thinking of going farther away.  
c. Well, I do like art, but I don't want to spend all my time in museums.
4. Oh, yes . . . that sounds marvellous.

The activity above shows various ways of inviting and making suggestions, and of rejecting and approving suggestions. In the dialogue above, Angela asks for a suggestion by saying, *What do you suggest?*

She is asking Ahmad for an idea about a place she could go to. It is a direct question.

***Making suggestions.*** The dialogue shows several ways of making suggestions. For example, Ahmad makes the first suggestion by saying, *I suggest you go to London.* This is a direct answer to her question "What do you suggest?" and seems like a command. It is a definite suggestion, not tentative like the others.

In Ahmad's second suggestion *What about Indonesia, then?* the question asked is very informal, of a sort used between familiar people. The suggestion put forward is subject to Angela's approval or rejection.

Ahmad's third suggestion shows the learner how to come up with another suggestion when the previous one has been rejected. Ahmad does this by saying, *Well, if you don't like that idea, another possibility is France.* This construction shows how to react when a suggestion has been rejected. In this case, Ahmad reacts positively by suggesting another possibility.

In the fourth suggestion, Ahmad says, *If I were you, I'd go to the Bahamas*. This is more like a piece of advice than a suggestion. Grammatically, it is a conditional sentence-that is, it expresses an unreal or hypothetical condition (*If I were you . . .*). A sentence that has a hypothetical meaning is usually expressed by the past tense in the dependent clause (conditional subclause) and by *d* (would) + infinitive in the main clause.

(Here the past tense *I'd* has nothing to do with past time: the reference is to present or future time.)

**Rejecting suggestions.** How does Angela reject Ahmad's suggestions? She rejects his first suggestion outright, by saying, *I don't think that appeals to me. . . .* This sentence is blunt and not formally polite. It indicates the speaker's displeasure with what has been suggested.

When Angela rejects Ahmad's second suggestion, she says *I was thinking of going farther away*. This is an indirect and polite way of saying "No" to a suggestion. The progressive aspect indicates the activity of "thinking" in progress, and therefore suggests not only that the activity is temporary (i.e., of limited duration) but that it need not be complete. When linked to a non-progressive event verb, or to a point of time, the progressive normally indicates that at that point, the activity denoted by the verb "thinking" is still in progress-that is, "thinking" has started but has not yet finished. This means that Angela had been thinking of a place farther away than Indonesia before Ahmad put forward his suggestion and that the thinking continued after that time.

In the dialogue, Angela rejects Ahmad's third suggestion by saying, *Well, I do like art, but I don't want to spend all my time in museums*. This is another example of a polite way of rejecting a suggestion. Here, two contrasting ideas have been linked by the coordinating conjunction *but*. The use of *but* makes the meaning more vague and less emphatic. It is characteristic of speech. The second clause, *but I don't want to spend all my time in museums*, is said with a tinge of sarcasm. This second clause is surprising or unexpected in contrast to the first clause, *Well, I do like art . . .*

**Approving suggestions.** The dialogue also shows learners how to approve a suggestion. Angela does it by saying, *Oh, yes . . . that sounds marvellous*. This exclamatory remark expresses Angela's feelings. She accepts the suggestion wholeheartedly. It shows her enthusiasm. Furthermore, the adjective *marvellous* intensifies the meaning of the sentence and adds emotive emphasis. It is not only good, but marvellous!

## Activity 2: Practice

*Teaching Point:* Practice in using structural patterns for the function "making suggestions."

The aim of this practice activity is to give the learners rapid practice in using structural patterns for the function of making suggestions. The chief advantage of this activity is that teachers can correct any errors that the learners make and can, at the same time, encourage them to concentrate on difficult elements. The following exercise gives the learners practice in making, rejecting, and approving suggestions.

This is what the teacher should do: distribute the task-sheets to the learners and tell them to read them carefully. Here is a sample sheet:

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**Task-sheet:**

Work in pairs. Look at the menu, and then read the dialogue below.

STRAITS VIEW RESTAURANT
<b>Menu</b>
Chili crabs
Crab soup
Chicken curry
Chicken with cashew nuts
Roast chicken
Fried prawns
Prawns in tomato sauce
Sweet and sour fish
Mixed vegetables
Ice cream
Fruit salad

**Dialogue:**

A: It's difficult to choose, isn't it?

B: Well, why don't you try chilli crabs? (*to suggest*)

A: No, I don't want to eat chilli crabs. (*to reject*)

B: What about chicken curry followed by prawns in tomato sauce?

(*to suggest*)

A: All right. Good. I'll try that.

(*to approve*)

Make up dialogues like this about the dishes you would like to choose from the menu above.

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Have the whole class do a drill first. Give the first prompt, sweet and sour fish, and hold up cards with words like roast chicken/crab soup as prompts for the trainees to say something like What about roast chicken followed by crab soup? Continue to give prompts where necessary until the learners show that they understand the drill and are able to do it. Then have them continue the exercise in pairs.

In this example at the intermediate level the learners are practising how to make, reject, and approve suggestions, and they are given the freedom to use their own ideas about how to express the functions.

How does structure fit into this activity? For example, if we study the sample dialogue, we will find two ways of making suggestions, i.e., Well, why don't you try chilli crabs? and What about chicken curry followed by prawns in tomato sauce? Both suggestions have the form of a question. In the first suggestion, the word Well expresses surprise and interest. It is what is called an "attention signal." The question, Why don't you try chilli crabs? is expressed informally and casually, as the speakers are familiar with each other, probably good friends. The second suggestion, What about chicken curry followed by prawns in tomato sauce? is spoken more tactfully and shows an element of tentativeness. It indicates the speaker's reluctance to commit herself.

Rejection of the first suggestion is accomplished by using a negative statement: No, I don't want to eat chilli crabs. Here the rejection is blunt and doesn't seem particularly polite.

The approval of the second suggestion (I'll try that) is definitely positive and agrees with the suggestion.

When devising practice activities, teachers should make sure that they are not overused- otherwise boredom sets in. As soon as the learners show that they can make correct sentences with the new item, the teacher should move on to more creative activities, such as information-gap or interaction activities.

### **Activity 3: Information Gap/Interaction**

*Teaching point:* Practice in wh- questions.

One of the problems with practice activities is that they can be monotonous. A way must be found to make controlled practice more meaningful and enjoyable. One of the ways of doing this is by using information-gap activities. These are designed so that the learners work together, exchanging information in a purposeful and interesting way. The sample exercise shown below gets the learners to practise grammatical items such as wh- questions in a motivating way for the function of inviting and making suggestions.

This is what the teacher should do:

1. Write the situation on the board.

2. Distribute Task-Sheets A and B to each pair. Give instructions to each pair not to look at each other's dialogue until they have finished the whole task.

***Situation***

Work in pairs.

You want to spend the weekend at the beach.  
You invite your best friend, and he/she agrees  
with your suggestion.

Complete the dialogue, making use of the cues  
given in parentheses.

**Task-Sheet A**

**A: (1)** \_\_\_\_\_?  
(*make a suggestion*)

**B: (2)** \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_?

**A: (3)** \_\_\_\_\_?  
(*make a suggestion*)

**B: (4)** \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_?

**A: (5)** \_\_\_\_\_?  
(*make a suggestion*)  
We can swim and dig for shellfish in the sand.

**B: (6)** \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_?

**A: (7)** \_\_\_\_\_?  
(*make a suggestion*)

**B: (8)** \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_?

**A:** Let's go by bus. It's more fun

**B: (9)** \_\_\_\_\_.

### Task-Sheet B

**A: (1) \_\_\_\_\_?**  
(*make a suggestion*)

**B: (2) I, Well, I don't know.**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(*invite suggestion*)

**A: (3) \_\_\_\_\_?**

**B: (4) \_\_\_\_\_?**  
(*accept suggestion*)

**A: (5) \_\_\_\_\_?**  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**B: (6) \_\_\_\_\_.**  
(*accept suggestion*)

When do you want to go?

**A: (7) \_\_\_\_\_?**

**B: Suits me fine. (8) \_\_\_\_\_.**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(*make a suggestion*)

**A: \_\_\_\_\_.**  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**B: (9) \_\_\_\_\_.**  
(*accept suggestion*)

If you study the task-sheets closely, you will find that the information that A and B have is slightly different in terms of functions. For example, A doesn't know B's cues and has to ask B, based on the cues written in his/her dialogue. B doesn't know A's cues and has to respond or ask A questions based on the cues written in his/her dialogue. A and B must not look at each other's dialogue until they have finished, so the only way they have of completing the task is by asking each other questions such as

A: "What shall we do this weekend?"

to which B will reply and invite suggestions such as



B: "Well, I don't know. What would you like to do?"

This is an example of an information-gap activity-where the learners have to ask each other for information to "close the gap" in the information they each have.

The suggested answers for the dialogue are:

1. Invite suggestion-*What shall we do this weekend?*
2. Invite suggestion-*What would you like to do?*
3. Make a suggestion-*Why don't we go out somewhere?*
4. Accept suggestion-*That's a good idea.*
5. Make a suggestion-*What about going to the beach?*
6. Accept suggestion-*Yes, I'd be delighted.*
7. Make a suggestion-*How about going on Saturday?*
8. Make a suggestion-*Shall we go by bus or by taxi?*
9. Accept suggestion-*All right.*

Suggestions are milder than commands, and they have a way of influencing people. Sometimes, the decision about what to do lies with the hearer. For example, if we take the first utterance, What shall we do this weekend? we find that the speaker is also involved in the suggestion and this is denoted by the word *we*.

As the response given by B is not positive, he invites suggestions from A by asking What would you like to do? The response from A, Why don't we go out somewhere? is very informal and familiar. The response, That's a good idea, shows acceptance of A's suggestion made in No. 3. In No. 5 A makes a suggestion, What about going to the beach? This is similar to No. 3 in function but is expressed by a different structure. B's answer, Yes, I'd be delighted has the same intonation pattern as That's a good idea in No. 4. A's question, How about going on Saturday? is another example of a way to make a suggestion. Here again, it leaves the decision about what to do to the hearer.

B asks, Shall we go by bus or by taxi? This is a limited question, which expects as an answer one of the two alternatives mentioned in the question, Shall we go by bus or by taxi? Notice that the intonation rises on both the alternatives. The response, Let's go by bus is a positive answer, which shows that A has selected to go by bus, and this is confirmed in No. 9. Generally, the sentence, Let's go by bus is a first-person command that begins with Let followed by us (normally abbreviated to 's).

This activity shows that the function of inviting, making, and accepting suggestions can have many different linguistic forms. Since the focus here is on real language use, a variety of structural patterns are presented together. For example, in the dialogue above there are two ways of inviting suggestions, that is,

*What shall we do this weekend?*  
*What would you like to do?*

In the dialogue, there are three different ways of making suggestions. They are,

*Why don't we go out somewhere?*  
*What about going to the beach?*  
*How about going on Saturday?*

Finally, the suggestions are accepted in three different ways, that is,

*That's a good idea.*  
*Yes, I'd be delighted.*  
*All right.*

Thus the learners become aware of the fact that one function can be expressed in several ways and of the level of formality of each.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the various activities devised above for the function of “inviting and making suggestions” have been carefully selected to coincide with the proficiency level of lower-intermediate non-TESL teacher trainees. It is not envisaged that the lecturer teaching such a course will stop at these activities. They are intended simply as samples that can serve as take-off points for further work.